6th Grade

Author's Craft/Language

- Distinguish how an author establishes mood and meaning through word choice, figurative language and syntax
- Interpret metaphors and similes to understand new uses of words and phrases in text
- Identify and understand an author's purpose for writing, including to explain, entertain, persuade or inform
- Identify an author's argument or viewpoint and assess the adequacy and accuracy of details used

What Students Need to Know:

- author's choice of words
- mood
- figurative language
    - metaphors
    - similes
    - idioms
    - personification
    - hyperboles
- syntax
- author's purpose
    - explain
    - entertain
    - persuade
    - inform
- author's argument or viewpoint
- adequacy
- accuracy of details

What Students Need to be Able to Do:

- interpret (author's choice of words and appeal to senses and to suggest mood; metaphors and similes)
- distinguish (how author establishes mood and meaning)
- understand (new uses of words; author's purpose)
- identify (author's purpose; use of figurative language; author's argument or viewpoint)
- explain (use of figurative language)
- assess (adequacy and accuracy of details)

Important Vocabulary

Hyberbole—A figure of speech which uses a deliberate exaggeration (e.g., I have told you a *million* times)

Idiom—A combination of words that is not strictly in accordance with grammatical rules and often possesses a meaning other than its grammatical or logical one (e.g., an easy test might be described as *a piece of cake*).

Metaphor—A figure of speech in which an implied comparison is made between two unlike things (e.g., he's a tiger).

Mood—The feeling or atmosphere that a writer creates for a reader; a reflection of an author's attitude toward a subject or theme

Personification—A figure of speech in which human qualities are attributed to animals, inanimate objects or ideas (e.g., a happy house).

Simile—A figure of speech in which a comparison is made between two unlike things using the words "like" or "as" (e.g., she's as sly as a fox.)

AUTHOR'S CRAFT

At this level, many of the grade level indicators deal with why authors make the choices they do in order to communicate their ideas to a reader. These decisions include:

- word choice to create mood
- use of figurative language
- language appropriate for specific purposes
- presenting arguments that will accomplish a purpose

Figurative Speech/Language comes in many forms:

- Simile (Comparisons often with as or like): As smooth as silk, as fast as the wind. Quick like a lightning bolt.
- Metaphor (Implicit comparison without like or as): You're such an airhead. It's bursting with flavor.
- Hyperbole (Exaggerating statement): In order to get my assignment done, I'll have to burn the midnight oil.
- Personification (Giving something a human quality): The sun smiled down on me...The leaves danced in the wind.
- Idiom (An everyday saying that doesn't exactly mean what the words say): It's raining cats and dogs. He's a backseat driver.

As a teacher, take time to teach the meanings of figurative language. Let the students brainstorm possible sayings for figurative language. Take a look at the list below and have students brainstorm a context for which the phrases could be used. For instance: When I want to use "Bells and whistles," I could be referring to the new computer I just bought which has lots of memory, a dvd burner, an amazing video card, a wireless keyboard and a mouse. Therefore I could say "My new computer has all the bells and whistles."

Use the list below, or let students brainstorm a list of figures of speech. Let them identify what the possible meanings of the phrases could be.

Some phrases that use figurative language:

At the drop of a hat.
Axe to grind.
Back to square one.
Bells and whistles.
Bed of roses.
Burn the midnight oil.
Clean sweep.
Chew the fat.
Cold feet.
Coast is clear.
Down in the dumps.
Ears are burning.
Forty winks.
Full of beans. Give me a break.
Give my right arm.
Mum's the word.
On the ball.
Out on a limb.
Pass the buck.
Pay through the nose.
Read between the lines.
Saved by the bell.
Spill the beans.
Take a rain check.
Through the grapevine.
True colors.
Under the weather.
Up my sleeve.
Upset the apple cart.
Walking on eggshells.

Easier - Figurative language or speech contains images. The writer or speaker describes something through the use of unusual comparisons, for effect, interest, and to make things clearer. The result of using this technique is the creation of interesting images.

Harder - Figurative language is not intended to be interpreted in a literal sense. Appealing to the imagination, figurative language provides new ways of looking at the world. It always makes use of a comparison between different things. Figurative language compares two things that are different in enough ways so that their similarities, when pointed out, are interesting, unique and/or surprising.

Suggested Strategies for Teaching Author's Craft

Mood Collages

Ask students to find words that denote certain moods. Cut out pictures that illustrate various moods and display them around the room.

Language Banks

Have students create language banks. Each bank should have a specific focus such as similes, metaphors, words that create a certain mood, etc. Start with a read aloud and challenge students to watch for great examples of the target you are working on. As examples are identified, begin recording them on a chart. Have students continue to search for more examples in their reading over the next few days.

The important part of these lessons is the *process* of searching through books, experiencing the excitement of the language and sharing discoveries. These rich collections of words and phrases become an integral part of the reading/ writing environment.

If your students keep a writer's notebook they could create their own personal lists as well. Ready-made lists don't work nearly as well. It is the ownership of searching through books, brainstorming and recording that excites the students and compels them to use the words and literary devices in their own writing.

This will not only help students with the reading indicators but also help them become better writers as they pay more attention to the author's craft. Writing and reading are reciprocal processes. When readers have rich experiences with literacy that include both reading and writing, comprehension has "fertile soil in which to flourish."

Think in Similes

Students often have trouble thinking in metaphorical terms. To help this, try the following exercise:

1. Explain to students what "intangible" means and then have students brainstorm a list of random intangible items. List these on the left-hand side of a t-chart.
2. Ask students if they can infer what "tangible" means. On the right-hand side of the chart, have students brainstorm a list of random tangible items. Something similar to the following may be generated:

Tangible Items	**Intangible Items**
skateboard	love
CD	hate
pizza	jealousy

3. Have the students complete the following sentence by selecting one intangible item and one tangible item and then exploring the relationship between these two items as follows: **(Intangible item**) is like a **(tangible item**) because _____.
4. Once students have tried this and have shared with one another, challenge them to extend their metaphors. Change the sentence to **(Intangible item**) is like a **(tangible item**) because _____ and _____.

This is a good way to introduce thinking in similes. Once students grasp this concept, they are ready to apply it to their reading. Have them select situations from their books and create similes related to their books like those mentioned above.

Figurative Language Requires Inferring

Interpreting figurative language requires a student to make inferences. Songs are a good place to start. Have students bring in some examples of songs to analyze. Analogies and fables can also work well. Help students see the connection between interpreting figurative language and making inferences.

Idioms in the Classroom

Read picture books out loud that feature idiomatic expressions, such as M. Terban's *Mad as a Wet Hen*. Ask students to draw comparisons between the literal and figurative meanings in the book. Have small groups of students work together to create their own books that feature idiomatic expressions.

Mood Collages

Ask students to find words that denote certain moods. Cut out pictures that illustrate various moods and display them around the room.

Language Collections

Help students become more aware of the language authors use that appeals to the senses by completing the attached Language Collection sheet. These sheets can be kept in students' writing notebooks so they can use some in their own writing.

LANGUAGE COLLECTION

Words/images that make me smile or laugh	Smells, sights, sounds that bring tears to my eyes

Words/phrases that paint a picture	Words that make noise

Forbidden words	Action words

Exploring the Imagery of Poetry

Fresh, vivid images distinguish good poetry from the mediocre. Begin a search for lines and full poems that develop interesting images, for example, similes and metaphors. Remember that both images compare two objects, but the simile expresses the relationship in explicit terms, as in "the sun is like a huge orange ball" or "that man is as sly as a fox." Conversely, in the metaphor the relationship is direct with no use of *like* or *as*. An example is "My friend is a rock on whom I can lean."

Many expressions have been used so frequently they have become trite, as in the example "as sly as a fox." Write some of these similes on the board, asking students to fill in the blanks:

As cold as _____ As blue as the _____
As busy as a _____ As quiet as a _____

You may be surprised to see how many students will easily come up with the same answers — ice, bee, sky, mouse. (However, be aware that this knowledge may be limited to native English speakers.)

Then take one of the comparisons, and challenge your students to suggest fresh images, such as the following, as you create a free verse poem together.

As quiet as . . .
A hummingbird at rest,
A kitten dreaming,
A house when all are sleeping.

Repeat the first line as you collect ideas for a second stanza and a third, if you like.

The metaphor achieves a similar effect, but it is more subtle than a simile. The poet presents one thing as another, sometimes without telling you; that's when you have to infer the meaning, as in these examples:

Night gathers itself into a ball of yarn.
Night loosens the ball and it spreads . . . ("Night" by Sandburg)

Skins of lemons are waterproof slickers . . . ("Skins" by Fisher)

In the morning the city
Spreads its wings . . . ("City" by Hughes)

A metaphor can be extensive, as in Emily Dickinson's "I Like to See It Lap the Miles" found on the next page in which a train is compared to a horse. Challenge students to figure out what such poems are describing in what is referred to as extended metaphors.

I LIKE TO SEE IT LAP THE MILES

Emily Dickinson

I like to see it lap the miles,
And lick the valleys up,
And stop to feed itself at tanks,
And then, prodigious, step

Around a pile of mountains,
And, supercilious, peer
In shanties by the sides of roads,
And then a quarry pare.

To fit its sides, and crawl between,
Complaining all the while
In horrid, hooting stanza,
Then chase itself down hill

And neigh like Boanerges —
Then, punctual as a star,
Stop — docile and omnipotent —
At its own stable door.

Mood

Mood is the emotional atmosphere that the writing evokes. It may be frantic, funny and exaggerated as in *Maniac McGee* (Spinelli, 2000), or droll, tongue-in-cheek as in *Ella Enchanted* (Levine, 1997). In *Fly Away Home* (1992), Bunting creates a somber tone while Bauer, in *On My Honor* (1986), evokes anxiety and remorse.

A poem's mood may be dark and mysterious (a scary poem) or bright and cheerful (a happy poem). The mood colors the whole poem and creates a feeling in the reader. The length of the sentences, the words that are chosen, and the sounds of the words all work to create the mood of a poem. Words such as *poor, lonely, old, alone,* and *tired* in the example below create a mood and make the reader feel sad.

Poor
by Myra Cohn Livingston

I hear of poor,
It means hungry, no food.
No shoes, no place to live,
Nothing good.

Short words and lines create a serious mood.

It means winter nights
And being cold.
It is lonely, alone.
Feeling old.

Poor is a tired face.
Poor is thin.
Poor is standing outside
Looking in.

Words create a feeling of sadness.

Creating Metaphors

Metaphors expose how objects or ideas that seem quite different might actually be, at a more general level, very similar. A classic example of metaphorical thinking is the statement, "Love is a rose." The concepts of *love* and *rose*, taken literally, are very different. However, they have general attributes in common; for example, they both have qualities that attract people, and they both can cause pain.

The goal of this activity is not necessarily to have students create poetic metaphors, although that is possible, but rather to guide them to see general relationships among terms in their notebooks or between a term and another seemingly different idea.

To engage students in metaphorical thinking, model the process and give explicit guidance. Follow some simple, concrete steps, such as the following:

1. List the specific characteristics of a targeted term.
2. Rewrite those characteristics in more general language.
3. Identify another specific term and explain how it also has the general characteristics identified during Step 2.

Creating a matrix can help students complete these steps. (See next page). In the example below, students have been guided through the first two steps and are now asked to identify someone who might be considered the "Frederick Douglass" for another era or another cause. In this example, the student is going to show how Helen Keller shared characteristics with Douglass.

Term	More General Description	Term
Frederick Douglass		***Helen Keller***
Was a slave as a young boy	Had a rough beginning	Got sick as a baby, which left her deaf and blind.
Learned to read and write anyway	Achieved goals even when difficult	Learned how to read Braille, write; she also went to college
Wrote books and gave speeches against slavery	Worked to help other people who suffered like him	Through her speech tours and writing, she inspired others to overcome their disabilities

Step 3 requires students to think of other specific examples of situations that have the same general pattern as that articulated in Step 2. For example, students might identify the civil rights movement or the women's movement, or they might see how the general pattern describes revolutions in history, the growth of political parties, or the plot of a story they have read.

Tip: At first, students might need significant guidance and modeling for this activity, especially as they try to decide just how general the language in Step 2 should be. Interestingly, however, teachers who use this process report that students who struggle with assignments requiring extensive writing sometimes demonstrate deep levels of insight when the focus is on this type of thinking. Set up small-group and whole-class interactions to provide opportunities for these students to shine.

Term	More General Description	Term